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James Thomas Allan

Grace Allan

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JAMES THOMAS ALLAN.*

James Thomas Allan, the only child of James and Jean Bowman Allan, was born in Pontiac, Oakland county, Michigan, Saturday September 30, 1831.

From his Scotch father he inherited a strong intellect and a tenacity of opinion, which was chastened and refined by his more sympathetic English mother, while from both he received a reverence and faith in a higher power, which in times of deepest gloom never wavered.

His education was principally in the academy of his native city. There he earned the reputation of a scholar, not only in the English branches, but also in the Greek and Latin languages, of which he was especially fond. To further satisfy his desire for knowledge, he taught school in Pontiac, after finishing at the academy. His parents had long cherished the idea of having their only son join the ministry, and for this purpose sent him at the age of eighteen to Princeton. Being too active for a sedentary life, and with ideas more liberal than the dark, austere creed of the Scotch Presbyterians of the day, he remained there but a short time.

On June 23, 1853, he was married to Miss Elizabeth A. Budington. He was greatly interested in agriculture and horticulture, of which from his early youth he was passionately fond. His home was that of the typical country gentleman. In the garden spot of our Northern states he inhaled a love of nature with each breath, and the effect was seen in the care and delight with which he cultivated her works. His especial pride was in new and rare varieties of fruits and flowers.

Becoming seized with the Western fever, in 1855 he paid his first visit to Nebraska territory. Bellevue was his destination, where his father had preceded him in June. He arrived December 19, 1855. Having made all arrangements to open the old mission house (which had been built in 1842) as a hotel, he returned to Pontiac to arrange his affairs preparatory to his change of residence.

* This biography of James T. Allan was written and presented to the State Historical Society by his daughter Grace—Mrs. Bradley.

In April, 1856, full of ambition and energy, with his wife and infant daughter, he left the beautiful home of his birth to brave the dangers of a new land. He took with him everything needful for not only comfort but luxury, not forgetting one thousand young apple trees, many of which are still bearing in Bellevue, together with an abundance of small fruits and flowering shrubs to relieve the wildness of a new country, and to perpetuate the memories of his old home.

They came up the river from St. Louis to St. Joe on the steamer "West Wind," the rest of the journey being on the steamer "Omaha" in company with J. H. Kellom, O. P. Ingalls, and Joseph Chapman, with their respective families. They landed May 4, 1856. The following June he opened the Bellevue House, which far exceeded in all its equipments any hotel in Nebraska. Judges Ferguson, Black, and Hall, Governor McComas, Generals Bowen and Strickland, Col. Peter A. Sarpy, Logan Fontenelle, and in fact the leading spirits of the territory made the house their stopping place.

Here was organized the Presbyterian church in Nebraska, with Rev. William Hamilton as minister. Mr. and Mrs. Allan, Mr. and Mrs. C. P. Storrs, and the Misses Maria and Elsie Hamilton as the choir.

In this year Bellevue was incorporated as a city, with Reuben Lovejoy as mayor. He was ably assisted by James T. Allan, W. D. Rowles, and A. H. Burtch, aldermen. *Young America*, the first newspaper of Bellevue, issued its initial sheet in Mr. Allan's house.

Mr. Allan removed to Omaha in October, 1859. He became chief clerk of the post office under W. W. Wyman, and E. B. Chandler's deputy clerk of the court. He assumed proprietorship of the Herndon House, a name suggestive of many memories to the early settlers. For years this was the stopping place of many men distinguished in civil, military, and political life. Receptions to General Curtis and General Sherman were given here, and it is doubtful if subsequent gatherings have ever been honored with more noted men than these. This house was the scene of the inception of the Union Pacific and of all the large merrymakings and celebrations of the embryo city. For six years Mr. Allan was the genial, generous host, ably assisted by Mrs. Allan, and many will remember to-day the hospitable welcome they received from them upon their arrival in the new country.

Could the walls of the old building speak, they would tell tales of many people stranded in pocket book, as well as ambition, whom he quietly helped with money and sympathy, and sent them on their way rejoicing.

Through failure to re-lease the hotel, Mr. Allan was compelled to abandon the Herndon in 1867, and for two years turned his attention to eating houses at Julesburg, Cheyenne, and Plum Creek. During Mr. Kellom's, Mr. Griffin's and Mr. Yost's terms as postmaster, he was employed in the Omaha post office as chief clerk, for which position he was pre-eminently adapted, gifted as he was with a remarkable memory. He inaugurated the system of free delivery in Omaha, and was at all times the accommodating, efficient, and pleasing right hand man of the office.

Owing to the split in the republican party the change of postmaster in 1878 necessitated a change in the higher officials of the department. It was at this time that he returned with renewed zeal to his first love, and henceforward devoted himself to horticulture and agriculture in all their branches. A long hoped-for wish was realized when he was made superintendent of tree planting on the U. P. railway. It had always been a pet theory with him that to plant trees along the iron highways would obviate the necessity of snow sheds and fences, besides furnishing the railroad company with ties. Through insufficient appropriations he was never able to put his plans in full operation, but a beginning is made that will yield abundant fruit. This has not been fully realized as yet, but in years to come the parks at the stations of the great overland route will be his monuments.

Mr. Allan was very active in collecting for Union Pacific displays at our state fairs, and for exhibits at eastern and western agencies. It was on one of these tours that a runaway accident resulted in a double fracture of the leg. From this he never fully recovered his physical strength.

In the winter of this year he was a delegate to the American Agricultural Association, convened at Chicago. He delivered an address on the "Meat Resources of Nebraska," which is thus commended by the *Inter-Ocean*:

"Proof is multiplying that the work of Mr. J. T. Allan before the late session of the American Agricultural Association was about the only bright spot in a dreary and sterile waste. Mr. Allan is receiving much well-earned praise from the leading agricultural journals of the country."

On his return he was principally employed in writing articles on the advantages of Nebraska. He is the author of five pamphlets published by the Union Pacific. Two hundred thousand copies were circulated. These, with innumerable newspaper articles, undoubtedly award to Mr. Allan the honor of causing more immigration to the state than any other man.

In the winter of 1882 he spent some time in the mountains collecting specimens of building stone on the lines of the Union Pacific for the Smithsonian. The cold and exposure of such a journey at this season of the year was more than his constitution could bear, and from that time his energy seemed to desert him. It was the last railroad business in which he was engaged.

January, 1883, he was elected secretary of the State Horticultural Society, which office he held at the time of his death. In 1884 he published a pamphlet of 67 pages, on the "Forests and Orchards of Nebraska," which received the highest praise from prominent horticulturists and the press. In February, 1885, he joined the Nebraska delegation at the New Orleans Exposition. He was an indefatigable writer, never lacking for words, and writing with ease and accuracy.

In addition to the articles published by the Union Pacific, Mr. Allan wrote many addresses and essays. In 1873 a committee consisting of Messrs. Thompson, Aughey, and Benton, appointed to pass upon the essays on the timber question, reported in favor of awarding the premium to Essay No. 4, written by James T. Allan, and henceforward known as the Prize Essay. Four thousand copies were distributed, and it was also published in the Washington Agricultural Report. Others were, "Forest Culture," "Diversified Agriculture," "Evergreens and Hardy Plants of the Rocky Mountains," "Nebraska and its Resources," "Nebraska and its Settlers," "Corn is King," "Meat Resources of Nebraska," etc., etc. He was a valued correspondent of the *American Journal of Science and Arts*, *Silliman's Journal*, *Boston Advertiser*, *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, and *Tribune*, *Edinburgh Journal of Forestry*, *Rural New Yorker*, *Country Gentleman*, *Breeders' Gazette*, and many others.

Mr. Allan was vice president of the State Board of Agriculture for 1871-2, vice president of the State Horticultural Society, 1871, president of the same, 1873-4-5, and secretary, 1883-4-5.

In September, 1873, Messrs. Allan, Furnas, and Masters repre-

sented the state at the Pomological Exhibition in Boston, where Nebraska was awarded the Wilder medal for the finest display. The previous year he, with Mr. Morton, was appointed delegate to the National Agricultural Convention in Washington.

In 1875 Mr. Allan attended the convention of the American Pomological Society in Chicago, where, as president of the Horticultural Society, he had the honor of receiving another medal awarded to Nebraska. At this meeting the American Forestry Association was organized. To quote from a published report: "J. T. Allan of Nebraska believed that the time had come for a national forestry association." He was honored with opening the meeting, and the presidency tendered to him. With characteristic courtesy and modesty he declined in favor of an older forester, J. A. Warder, of Ohio, but was appointed chairman of the committee on statistics to report at the Centennial.

In January, 1878, as a recognition of valuable services for years in furnishing essays on various subjects, statistics, and other information, Mr. Allan was elected a life member of the State Horticultural Society.

He was also a charter member of the State Historical Society, being one of the committee on constitution and by-laws; of the American Forestry Association; secretary of the Nebraska Academy of Science, and an honorary member of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society.

He was active in the formation of the republican party in Nebraska, and was among the first to draw the party lines. Though always maintaining an interest in the politics of the state, they never absorbed his attention. It was in the horticultural annals that he aspired to have his name, and in this branch of industry that he most benefited his fellow-men.

Although Mr. Allan's health had been failing for some time, his condition did not excite serious apprehension. Thursday, November 19, 1885, he spent at his home, reading his favorite author, Sir Walter Scott, and attending to his correspondence, although not able to answer the same. Toward night he seemed to grow better, and was soon quietly sleeping.

Friday dawned with all the warmth and promise of a day in May. Becoming restless, Mr. Allan rose and read for some time, and wishing to go out doors, left his book open, and his glasses beside it.

He was soon followed by his daughter Mary, but the dread messenger had already come, for

“When the sun in all his state
Illumed the eastern skies,
He passed through glory's golden gate
And waked in Paradise.”

This closed the earthly existence of one gifted with the strength of a man and the tenderness of a woman, of one who never intentionally, by word or deed, injured a fellow-man. Generous and modest to a fault, his deeds were never blazoned before the public.

“He was a man of large intelligence and conspicuous usefulness. Always in advance of a distrustful public, he lived to see his most sanguine views and predictions realized. Few men will be more missed from the influential circle in which he moved.”

When the affairs of the present shall engross the coming generations of a great and prosperous commonwealth, many of the men who “helped to plant civilization, and who shook hands with the Indian before he had been pushed away from the home of his fathers,” will be forgotten. But when the name of James T. Allan is forgotten by men, God's lesser creatures—the trees which he planted and caused to be planted—will continue to teach the lesson he taught, “Plant trees, plant trees.”

JAMES S. ALLAN, father of James T. Allan, born in Glasgow, Scotland, November 5, 1805. Jean Bowman Allan, mother of James T. Allan, born in Richmond, Yorkshire, England, about the year 1797. They were married at Raby Castle, and sailed at once for America. James Thomas Allan, born in Pontiac, Oakland Co., Michigan, Saturday, September 30, 1831. Elizabeth A. Budington, born in Perry, Wyoming Co., New York, July 5, 1833. The children are, Jean Marion Allan, born in Pontiac, Oakland Co., Michigan, July 2, 1855; Grace Isabel Allan, born in the mission house, Bellevue, Sarpy Co., Nebraska, August 9, 1857; Mary P. Allan, born in the mission house, Bellevue, Sarpy Co., Nebraska, October 21, 1859; Jessie, born in the Herndon House, Omaha, December 15, 1861; Donald Budington Allan, born in the Herndon House, Omaha, August 27, 1866; Blanche Ayers, born in Omaha, December 16, 1869; Elizabeth Peck Allan, born in Omaha, October 21, 1872.

Grace Isabel Allan and A. R. Bradley were married in Omaha, April 25, 1878. Her present residence is St. Libory, Howard Co.,

Nebraska. Grace Virginia, Elizabeth Budington, and Allan Read are the names of their three children.

Jean Marion Allan and W. R. Johnson were married in Omaha, June 11, 1879. Her present residence is Omaha. Her three children are Robert, Erwin, and Donald Allan Johnson.

JOHN McMECHAN.*

Died, November 3, 1883, at "Headwood," the family residence, in Otoe county, near Nebraska City, Nebraska, of the infirmities incident to old age, John McMechan, aged 83 years and 23 days. The McMechan family is of Scotch origin, and lived in Ayreshire, but being active and leading members of the "Solemn League and Covenant," was forced, by religious persecution, to leave Scotland in 1650, and settled in the county Antrim, in Ireland, near "White Abbey," five miles from the city of Belfast.

John McMechan, the father of the subject of our sketch, was a wealthy land-owner, and the family estate in Ayreshire and Antrim county numbered several thousand acres of grazing and tillable lands. His wife was a Miss Mary Ballentine, daughter of David Ballentine, of Ayreshire, and grand niece of Lord John Ballentine, a cousin of Mary Queen of Scots. John McMechan was born on October 10, 1800, at the family homestead "Carmonia," near the "White Abbey," five miles from Belfast. He had four brothers and five sisters. He survived all of his brothers and two of his sisters. In 1810 the family came to America and settled in Belmont county, Ohio, eight miles from Wheeling, Virginia, and his father in the same year purchased the "Indian Springs" farm, so called from the springs at which the Indians camped previous to attacking Wheeling.

His parents being Covenanters, were remarkably reverent in their observances of the teachings of divine truth, and he being early impressed with them, grew up with an abiding sense of duty and right, and a strong hostility to false pretenses. He received a good and thorough common school education, the best to be had in those days in that new and sparsely settled country. He also learned the lessons

*The biographies of John and Matilda McMechan were prepared by their son, A. C. McMechan.